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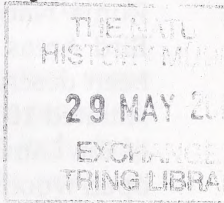
Stuart, S.N., Jensen, F.P., Brøgger-Jensen, S. & Miller, R.I. 1993. The zoogeography of the montane forest avifauna of eastern

(continued on inside back cover)



# Blue Swallow *Hirundo atrocaerulea* in Kenya: status survey and conservation options

P. Kariuki Ndang'ang'a



Blue Swallow *Hirundo atrocarealea* is endemic to sub-Saharan Africa and is an intra-African migrant (Turner & Rose 1989). In southern Africa, it breeds in eastern South Africa, north-western Swaziland, eastern Zimbabwe and adjacent Mozambique. In eastern Africa, it breeds in northern Malawi, north-eastern Zambia, south-eastern Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) and south-western Tanzania (Evans *et al.* 2002). In the non-breeding season Blue Swallows migrate from throughout their breeding range to southern Uganda, western Kenya, north-eastern DRC and north-western Tanzania but do not breed there (Earle 1987).

The primary habitat on the breeding range is a combination of highland grassland interspersed with drainage lines in gullies and valleys and other wetland areas such as pans and small dams (Keith *et al.* 1992). In the non-breeding range the primary habitat includes moist grasslands in Kenya and seasonally flooded edges of permanent wetlands in Uganda (Nasirwa & Njoroge 1996; Evans *et al.* 2002). These habitats are disappearing rapidly and parts of the range have undergone profound changes leading to a major decline in numbers. Blue Swallow is therefore classified as globally Vulnerable (BirdLife International 2006). The East African population is classified as Endangered according to regional criteria (Bennun & Njoroge 1996).

Blue Swallows visit the open grasslands of western Kenya in the non-breeding season between April and September (Zimmerman *et al.* 1999). These pockets of grassland are disappearing fast in Kenya. Updated information on the status of the species in Kenya and the sites where it is found has, however, been lacking. Conservation efforts for the species in Kenya have been minimal with only a single one-day survey undertaken (Nasirwa & Njoroge 1996) prior to the one reported here.

In this paper, the conservation of Blue Swallow in its Kenyan non-breeding grounds is addressed by: (1) presenting the results of a recent rapid survey of the Blue Swallow and its habitat in Kenya, and (2) exploring realistic conservation options for the species in Kenya, mainly based on the experience gained from the survey and by referring to the International Blue Swallow Action Plan (Evans *et al.* 2002). The rapid survey was specifically aimed at estimating the number of Blue Swallows that winter on the Kenyan sites; estimating the current extent, quality and rate of loss of Blue Swallow habitat in Kenya; and identifying specific threats facing the species in Kenya.



## Study Area

Ruma National Park and Busia Grasslands are the two Kenya Important Bird Areas (IBAs) where Blue Swallow is known to occur. Both sites have been described by Bennun & Njoroge (1999, 2001). Ruma National Park is situated 10 km east of Lake Victoria in western Kenya. It lies on the flat floor of the Lambwe valley. The terrain is mainly rolling grassland, with tracts of open woodland and thickets dominated by species of *Acacia* and *Balanites*. A variety of mammals occur in the park but the most notable is Roan Antelope *Hippotragus equinus*, a rare species in Kenya. The surrounding area is settled, with a mix of small-scale cultivation and grassy pasture. The surrounding population density is high, but people and their livestock avoid the Ruma area because of the presence of tsetse fly. It is the only protected area in Kenya where the Blue Swallow is regularly recorded.

Busia Grasslands is a chain of small patches (some seasonally flooded) in western Kenya to the east of Busia town. Nasirwa & Njoroge (1996) identified some of the patches (Matayo, Mungatsi, Malanga and Sikoma) while the rest were identified from information provided by local people (Karungu/Madende, Nambale Bridge, Walawatsi river, Musokoto, and Kiseka). Additional small patches (<0.5 ha) may be found elsewhere in the Busia District, especially along the river valleys. All these patches are surrounded by intensive agriculture, mainly maize and sugarcane, and are grazed by livestock. They are under severe and immediate threat due to pressure from the large, rapidly increasing human population.

## Methods

The survey took place between 27 August and 5 September 2003, at a time when the Blue Swallow is found in western Kenya as a non-breeding visitor (Zimmerman *et al.* 1996). In Ruma National Park the swallows were searched for and counted within 16 belt transects (0.2 x 2.0 km each) by driving along access roads within the park at an average speed of 15 km h<sup>-1</sup> whilst three observers counted from the back of the open vehicle. 15 of these transects were counted twice. In Busia, swallows were searched for in grassland patches and counted by observers walking 22 transects (0.2 x 0.5 km each) with nine of these transects being counted twice. All Blue Swallows and other hirundines seen along these transects were counted. The group size and composition (adult or juvenile/immature based on tail streamer length) of Blue Swallows was recorded. For perching birds, the perch type and height was recorded.

Estimates were made of the Blue Swallow populations in the study sites by extrapolating the observed densities of Blue Swallows along transects into the area of suitable habitat in the study sites. The 95 % confidence interval was used to express the expected variation of the average density. Repeat counts were made on separate days and were treated as statistically independent samples due to the high mobility of the birds, which ensured that counts obtained on the same transect visited on different days were not correlated



with each other. For the calculation of population densities, the number of sampled transects in Ruma and Busia was therefore 31 in each case (16 + 15 and 22 + 9, respectively).

Sample plots (radius = 50 m) spread throughout the study sites, some chosen randomly and others located where Blue Swallows were recorded, were assessed for various vegetation and topographical variables including: % cover of grassland, other habitat types and any human land use practices (e.g. cultivation); grass height at four points; grazing intensity (rated using a score of 0–3); presence of grazing species; intensity of woody species (rated using a score of 0–3); dominant woody and grass species; and slope. A digitised map of Ruma National Park (Spranger *et al.* 2003) was used to estimate current vegetation cover in the park. Potential threats to the species and its habitat were recorded. In Busia, opportunistic contacts were made with local community members present in the areas visited during fieldwork. In Ruma National Park, the research team met rangers on duty, and also scheduled a meeting with the Warden.

## Results

### *Grassland extent*

In Ruma National Park open or sparsely wooded grasslands covered 68 % (c. 8850 ha) of the park while forest, woodlands and thickets covered the remaining 32 % (c. 4250 ha). Approximately 1450 ha of the grasslands in the park were unlikely to be seasonally flooded or wet as they were located on steep areas of the Kanyamaa escarpments in the southeast and southern end of the park. As such, wet grasslands covered c. 7400 ha. Areas outside the park were densely populated by humans and were often cultivated, even heavily so, providing little habitat for Blue Swallows. In Busia, grasslands occurred in patches of varying sizes (Table 1), with a total grassland area of c. 230 ha. Only 36 % of the area falling within our belt transects in Busia was covered with grassland.

### *Bird counts and population estimates*

In Ruma National Park, Blue Swallows were recorded within five of the 16 belt transects during the first set of counts. During the second set of counts, they were recorded within only two of the same transects in which they had initially been recorded in the first set of counts. A total of 72 birds were seen, 42 on the first count and 30 on the second. A mean density ( $\pm$  SD) of  $0.06 \pm 0.13$  birds  $\text{ha}^{-1}$  ( $n = 31$ ) was recorded for the entire area sampled in the park. The birds were patchily distributed within the park, and occurred in relatively high densities at localities where they were detected. Within transects in which Blue Swallows were recorded a maximum and minimum density of 0.5 birds  $\text{ha}^{-1}$  and 0.1 birds  $\text{ha}^{-1}$  were recorded respectively.

In the Busia Grassland fragments, Blue Swallows were encountered within four of the 22 transects that were counted, with the first two encounters



Table 1. Status of sites surveyed for Blue Swallow in western Kenya.

Site	Lat, Long	Altitude (m)	Wet grassland area (ha)	No. of Blue Swallows seen	Threats
Ruma N. Park	00°35'S, 34°12'E	1200- 1600	7400	72	Food crop cultivation, burning
Busia					
(i) Karungu/Madende	00°28'20"N, 34°21'02"E	1234	8	0*	Drainage, food crop cultivation, settlement
(ii) Mungatsi	00°28'01"N, 34°19' 40"E	1213	5	0*	Sugar cane cultivation
(iii) Walawatsi river	00°29'29"N, 34°18'48"E	1201	15	0	Food crop cultivation, bush encroachment
(iv) Nambale bridge	00°27'08"N, 34°15'28"E	1186	1	0	Sugar cane cultivation
(v) Musokoto (along Musokoto river)	00°29'16"N, 34°18'17"E	1212	18	8	Food crop cultivation, bush encroachment, exotic tree plantation
(vi) Kiseka (Mzee Lino's farm)	00°28'39"N, 34°16'15"E	1197	25	13	Food crop cultivation
(vii) Sikoma (along Lelekwe river)	00°23'53"N, 34°17'04"E	1209	6	0*	Food crop cultivation, overgrazing
(viii) Malanga (along Lelekwe river)	00°25'25"N, 34°15'18"E	1249	1	0	Food crop cultivation
(ix) Matayos (along Sio river)	00°23'11"N, 34°08'39"E	1166	150	0*	Food crop cultivation, overgrazing, grass cutting, bush encroachment, burning, trapping, digging of dams

\* Sites where Blue Swallow was not seen but based on grassland extent and condition, it is predicted that they could be suitable sites visited by the species.



occurring during the first set of counts and the other two during the second set of counts. No transects had birds during both visits. A total of 21 birds were seen, 8 in the first count and 13 in the second. A mean density ( $\pm$  SD) of  $0.07 \pm 0.18$  birds  $\text{ha}^{-1}$  ( $n = 31$ ) was recorded for the entire sampled area in Busia. As was the case in Ruma National Park, birds in Busia grasslands also seemed to occur patchily and at high densities within localities where they were encountered with a maximum and minimum densities of 0.7 birds  $\text{ha}^{-1}$  and 0.1 birds  $\text{ha}^{-1}$  respectively.

Blue Swallows were the second most abundant hirundine in Ruma after Barn Swallow *H. rustica*, but were third in Busia after Barn Swallow and Lesser Striped Swallow *H. abyssinica*. The total population for both Ruma National Park and Busia Grasslands was estimated to be c. 446 individuals, with specific estimates for Ruma N.P. and Busia Grasslands ( $\pm 95\%$  CI) being  $430 \pm 338$  ( $n = 31$ ) and  $16 \pm 14$  ( $n = 31$ ) individuals respectively.

### Habitat

Blue Swallows were only recorded in open grasslands and wooded grasslands. This is consistent with the observations of Msuha & Sutherland (2001) who found that Blue Swallows preferred areas with the fewest to no trees. They were absent in the non-grassland areas, e.g. cultivation and settlements. Grass height within transects where Blue Swallows were found ranged from 0.5 to 2.5 m (mean =  $1.3 \pm 0.3$  m,  $n = 12$ ). The height, however, did not differ significantly between the random transects where the swallows were absent and those where they were present (t-test,  $p = 0.589$ , d.f. = 40).

In Ruma National Park, Blue Swallows were seen within areas that were flat and entirely covered by sparsely wooded grasslands, with a low intensity of woody plants. Although most (69 %,  $n = 38$ ) of the sampled transects were flat, a higher proportion (80 %,  $n = 10$ ) of occupied transects were flat compared with unoccupied (66 %,  $n = 28$ ). In Ruma *Acacia drepanolobium*, *A. xanthophloea* and *Balaenites aegyptica* were the main woody species that occurred within the transects in which the Blue Swallow was recorded, but the actual points where the birds were located (including one where two birds were observed casually) were all dominated by short (0.5–3.0 m tall) *A. drepanolobium* trees. The dominant grass species in transects where the swallow was recorded was *Themeda triandra* (Gramineae).

In Busia, all the Blue Swallows were seen within transects that were mainly covered by open grassland (70 %), but were interspersed with cultivation (20 %) and thickets (10 %). *Miscanthus violaceus* (Gramineae) was the dominant grass species at occupied localities in Busia.

### Perching sites, group size and composition

All the Blue Swallows that were seen perching in the Ruma National Park ( $n = 11$ ) were sitting on short (mean height =  $2.0 \pm 0.5$ ,  $n = 11$ ), dry or leafless *A. drepanolobium* trees that stood just slightly higher than the mean grass height



in the area. Seven perching Blue Swallows seen in Busia were sitting on tall (1.5–3 m) stands of the grass *M. violaceus* at a mean height of 1.5 m above the ground.

The birds were seen in groups of 2–7 birds (mean = 4,  $n = 10$ ). In most cases the groups ( $n = 7$ ) were mixed with Barn Swallows ( $n = 6$ ), White-headed Saw-wing *Psalidoprocne albiceps* ( $n = 2$ ) and Lesser Striped Swallow ( $n = 1$ ). Mixed group sizes of 4–40 swallows were recorded. Juvenile/immature birds constituted 18 % of the birds that were observed during the survey.

### *Distribution within sites*

At Ruma, Blue Swallows were only recorded within the park boundaries. They were recorded in the open but sparsely wooded rolling grasslands in the south-eastern part of the park, on the flat floor of the Lambwe valley, mostly on the southern side of the Olambwe River (most of the sightings were made on both sides of the road between the park airstrip and Wiga Gate). No Blue Swallow was recorded in the forest strip along the Olambwe River, the grasslands on the steep Kanyamaa escarpment on the far southeast of the park and the open grasslands in the northern-most part of the park, and cultivated areas outside the park.

In Busia, Blue Swallows were only recorded in a grassland patch in Kiseka, 2 km north of Nambale town and another patch along Walawatsi River, 3 km north of Mungatsi town (Table 1).

### *Threats*

Most of the threats that the Blue Swallow faces on its Kenyan sites result from the loss of its habitat. Loss of grasslands immediately outside Ruma National Park is severe, and almost every available area is cultivated, heavily grazed or settled. Within the park, grazing is limited to wild animals and apparently does not go beyond the required level for persistence of Blue Swallows. Burning of grasslands was observed in a small part near the park airstrip. We, however, observed a group of Blue Swallows sallying over the burnt area. It is therefore possible that this patchy burning provides opportunities for sallying Blue Swallows to feed on swarms of insects flying over burnt patches. In fact, burning might also be an important management option in the long term, as it prevents the invasion of shrubs and trees.

Busia grasslands are found on privately owned land so the Blue Swallow faces more severe threats here (Table 2). Loss of grasslands was observed to be to the most common threat in Busia. The local people also reported trapping of swallows for food as a common practice.

## **Discussion**

The results of this study show that Ruma National Park is a stronghold for Blue Swallows visiting Kenya during the non-breeding season. This can be attributed to a lack of immediate threats within the park due to its



**Table 2.** Specific threats/issues in Busia and their relative importance for the conservation status of the species (low = \* medium = \*\* high = \*\*\*).

Food crop cultivation	***
Sugar cane cultivation	***
Burning	*
Drainage	*
Settlement	**
Bush encroachment (had encroached up to 12 % of grassland area)	*
Planting of exotic tree plantation e.g. Eucalyptus	*
Overgrazing	**
Grass cutting	*
Trapping of swallows for food	**
Digging of fishing dams in flood areas	*

protection by the Kenya Wildlife Service (KWS) and a large area of suitable habitat within the park. This contrasts with the chain of grassland fragments in Busia that are currently facing numerous threats because they are unprotected, small and continue to decrease in size. The result is that they support a small, and probably declining, Blue Swallow population. Compared with Nasirwa & Njoroge's (1996) survey some of the potential grassland fragments in Busia (e.g. Mungatsi) seem to have lost over 60 % of their grassland cover within the past decade.

It is possible that high diurnal movements between the grassland patches by Blue Swallows and the small number of counts made per transect and grassland patch greatly reduced the chance of observing Blue Swallows at some of the sites. It is also possible that Blue Swallows require more than the presence of grasslands. The grasslands also need to be moist (Msuha & Sutherland 2001). This could be a factor that contributed to the patchy distribution of the birds and occurrence in relatively high densities at localities where they were detected. Such patchy distribution makes population extrapolation difficult.

An optimum searchheight should exist for a predator foraging in a given height where the benefits of field vision size balance the costs of prey discrimination (Soobramoney *et al.* 2004). The selection of perching sites could therefore have been influenced by how well the sites offered a good view for sallying insects. The dry leafless *A. drepanolobium* (in Ruma) and the tall *M. violaceus* grass stands (in Busia) standing above the average grass height probably offered a wider unobstructed view of the surrounding ground whereas leafy trees impeded the view. If perching sites were utilized for providing a good foraging view, they did not necessarily need to be very high since the grassland vegetation was relatively low, thus probably explaining the observed low height of the Blue Swallow perch sites. In fact,



field observations in Ruma N. P. showed a high coincidence of Blue Swallow locations with *A. drepanolobium* trees, which were relatively less leafy and shorter, compared to other trees (*A. xanthophloea* and *Balaenites aegyptica*) found within the sparsely wooded grasslands in the park. I suggest that the importance of perch characteristics in explaining the local distribution of Blue Swallows be assessed further.

All the Blue Swallows were observed in relatively flat areas covered by grasslands. Flatter areas were more likely to be marshy, consistent with the observations of Msuha & Sutherland (2001) who found that Blue Swallows preferred marsh areas. Grassland cover and topography are therefore likely to be quite important factors in determining the local distribution of Blue Swallows.

### *Some conservation options for the Blue Swallow in Kenya*

The survey has confirmed that western Kenya still offers important non-breeding grounds for the Blue Swallow. The sites, especially in Busia, are however faced with serious threats and urgent interventions are necessary. Since the Blue Swallow habitat in Busia is found within privately owned land, any conservation approach will have to be integrated with development activities so that they are accepted by the landowners. Because Blue Swallows in Busia were seen within grasslands of c. 20 ha and as narrow as 200 m but lying along streams/drainage lines, plans to create reserves of grassland mosaics need not necessarily comprise one large contiguous piece of land, but possibly a chain of strategically selected, reasonably sized, grasslands along drainage lines.

Since Blue Swallows are intra-African migrants, it is necessary that conservation activities within Kenya are well coordinated with those of other range countries. Further effort could be put into forming links with the existing organizations protecting the habitat of the Blue Swallow as well as the Africa Blue Swallow Working Group formed in 2002 (Evans *et al.* 2002).

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# New and notable records of birds from Serengeti National Park

Thomas K. Gottschalk

Most ornithologists visiting Serengeti National Park (SNP) in Tanzania focus their activity around the southern plains and Lake Ndutu. As a result, little ornithological work has been undertaken in the more remote north and west of the park, especially in the evergreen forests of the Mara River and in the Western Corridor along the Grumeti, Orangi and Mbalageti Rivers. Poachers use the forested areas for cover (Campbell & Hofer 1995, Hofer *et al.* 2000) and walking is prohibited in the park, thus many wooded areas and parts without roads are rarely visited by ornithologists. However, many of these areas contain a number of birds which cannot be found in other parts of SNP.

Schmidl (1982) published a bird list for SNP of 496 bird species. Records since then have brought the total to 529 with more recent records being shown in Table 1. Recent contributions on different aspects of the SNP avifauna are found in Brett (1995), Gottschalk (2001a, 2002), Gottschalk *et al.* (2007), Baker & Baker (2002), Sinclair *et al.* (2002) and Trager & Mistry (2003).

**Table 1.** Bird species reported new for SNP since 1990.

English name	Scientific name	Reference
Blue Swallow	<i>Hirundo atrocaerulea</i>	Zimmermann <i>et al.</i> (1996), Baker & Baker (2002)
Half-collared Kingfisher	<i>Alcedo semitorquata</i>	Oatley (2001)
Black-backed Cisticola	<i>Cisticola eximius</i>	Gottschalk (2001b)
Grey-olive Greenbul	<i>Phyllastrephus cerviniventris</i>	Gottschalk (2002)
Red-capped Robin Chat	<i>Cossypha natalensis intensa</i>	Gottschalk (2002)
Green-backed Twinspot	<i>Mandingoa nitidula</i>	Gottschalk (2002)
Short-eared Owl	<i>Asio flammeus</i>	Stevenson & Fanshawe (2002)
Black-winged Pratincole	<i>Glareola nordmanni</i>	Baker & Baker (2002)
Yellow-whiskered Greenbul	<i>Andropadus latirostris</i>	Demey (2004)
Black-billed Barbet	<i>Lybius guifsobalito</i>	Demey (2004)
Black-rumped Buttonquail	<i>Turnix hottentota</i>	Leonard & Leonard (2004)
Little Weaver	<i>Ploceus luteolus</i>	Fry & Keith (2004)
Karamoja Apalis	<i>Apalis karamojae</i>	Shaw <i>et al.</i> (2005)
Pangani Longclaw	<i>Macronyx aurantiigula</i>	Baker <i>in litt.</i> (2005)



I report here 26 new species for SNP (marked by an asterisk) and observations of 46 species with few former records. Observations were made in almost all areas of the park between May 1999 and June 2000, January 2001, February 2005 and February 2006. These observations bring the SNP list up to 555 species.

Common and scientific names follow Stevenson & Fanshawe (2002) with recent changes taken from Fry & Keith (2004). Names of localities follow Tombazzi's (2003) map of SNP. The Raho dam is located in the northern part of the Western Corridor at the border between the National Park and the Grumeti Game Reserve. Photographs of mist-netted species can be viewed at [www.cisticola.de](http://www.cisticola.de) and GPS coordinates of all bird records are available upon request. Additional information was provided by N. Baker from the database of the Tanzania Bird Atlas Project (TBAP) for the forthcoming Baker & Baker *The birds of Tanzania: an atlas of distribution and seasonality* ([www.tanzaniabirdatlas.com](http://www.tanzaniabirdatlas.com)).

### **Long-tailed Cormorant** *Phalacrocorax africanus*

One was at the Raho dam on 15 January 2000. Schmidl (1982) notes only two records from the Grumeti and Orangi Rivers. This species is common in the nearby Speke Bay Gulf of Lake Victoria and records in the Serengeti area seem to have increased in recent years (N. Baker *in litt.* 2005, TBAP).

### **Rufous-bellied Heron** *Ardea rufiventris* \*

A male was at the Raho dam on 15 January 2000 and three single adult birds were north of the Mara River in various small swamps on 27 March 2000. Records of this species in the north of SNP are unsurprising since it is known from the nearby Mara Game Reserve (Zimmermann *et al.* 1996). The TBAP contains two further records of Rufous-bellied Heron for SNP (N. Baker *in litt.* 2005).

### **White-backed Night-Heron** *Gorsachius leuconotos*

During the wet seasons on 24 May 1999 and 17 March 2000 a White-backed Night-Heron was seen feeding at night on the flooded bridge of the Grumeti River at Kirawira. The first documented sighting of this species was also at Kirawira (Kleinbaum & Alden 1983). The TBAP includes three further records of this species for SNP (Baker *in litt.* 2005).

### **Little Egret** *Egretta garzetta* \*

A single bird was seen at the Raho dam on 7 September 1999 and one bird was observed at Lake Ndutu on 22 March 2000. According to Zimmermann *et al.* (1996) this species is widespread on both fresh and alkaline waters. However, it was not included by Schmidl (1982). The TBAP includes more than 30 records for the Serengeti area (Baker *in litt.* 2005).

### **Western Banded Snake-Eagle** *Circaetus cinerascens*

This uncommon species of riverine woodlands and forest patches (Zimmermann *et al.* 1996) was seen in the Mara region on 3 February 2000

with another bird at the Bolongonja Spring on 26 February 2000. These are the second and third records for SNP (Stronach 1990) and the TBAP has seven further records (N. Baker *in litt.* 2005).

**Long-legged Buzzard** *Buteo rufinus* \*

A first year bird was circling above Seronera on 16 March 2000. While Stevenson & Fanshawe (2002) mention just a few records of this Palearctic migrant in Kenya and Tanzania, mainly from November–April, the TBAP includes 17 records for Tanzania (N. Baker *in litt.* 2005).

**Greater Spotted Eagle** *Aquila clanga* \*

One was seen north of the Mara River for about five minutes, circling northwards on 4 February 2000. This scarce Palearctic vagrant has been recorded in Kenya between October and February. According to Baker (*in litt.* 2005) this is only the sixth record for Tanzania.

**Booted Eagle** *Hieraaetus pennatus* \*

On 27 March 2000 a Booted Eagle was seen north of the Mara River. According to Zimmermann *et al.* (1996) this species is an uncommon but regular Palearctic migrant, but is absent from Schmidl's (1982) list for SNP. Of 204 records for Tanzania, only six have been in SNP (N. Baker *in litt.* 2005).

**Amur Falcon** *Falco amurensis*

Four female/immature birds were resting in trees on a koppie on the Serengeti Plains on 16 December 1999. Four more birds, including at least one male, were observed on the Musabi Plains on 6 May 2000. Only one record was listed by Schmidl (1982). According to Baker (*in litt.* 2005, TBAP) 11 records have been made in SNP to date.

**Saker Falcon** *Falco cherrug* \*

This rare Palearctic migrant was seen flying low along a small dry stream close to Lake Magadi on 7 February 2000. The whitish crown of an adult bird was clearly visible. This is the sixth record for Tanzania (N. Baker pers. comm.).

**Corncrake** *Crex crex* \*

One was flushed from long grass southeast of Seronera on 10 April 2000. The long legs and the rufous wing-coverts were clearly visible. Another was seen southeast of the Seronera airstrip on 19 April 2000. Although this species has been regularly recorded in the Mara GR in April (Zimmermann *et al.* 1996) it has not been reported from SNP though according to Baker (*in litt.* 2005, TBAP) six other records have been made in SNP to date.

**Spur-winged Plover** *Vanellus spinosus*

This species is quite common in the Mara region of SNP. A total of 24 birds in eight sightings were seen in 1999 and 2000. Most of these were close to the Mara River. One record is given in Schmidl (1982) on 20 August 1972 and a



second sight record is from Seronera in June 1962 (Baker 1994). This species has been recorded regularly in Speke Bay on Lake Victoria, which is located close to the park (Baker *in litt.* 2005, TBAP).

**Violet-tipped Courser** *Rhinoptilus chalcopterus*

One was seen and photographed east of the Serengeti Research Centre on 6 May 1999. Two records of this rare courser are reported in Schmidl (1982) though according to Zimmermann *et al.* (1996) Violet-tipped Courser is not known from northern Tanzania. According to Baker (*in litt.* 2005, TBAP) there are ten records from SNP to date.

**Sanderling** *Calidris alba*

Three birds were at Lake Magadi on 18 October 1999. Schmidl (1982) listed only one record, in March 1966, and it is rare inland.

**Black-tailed Godwit** *Limosa limosa*

Three birds were at Lake Ndutu on 24 August 1999. Schmidl (1982) reported only one record of this scarce species in September 1968. While up to 10000 birds winter in Tanzania (Baker 1997) there are only six other records from SNP to date (Baker *in litt.* 2005, TBAP).

**Broad-billed Sandpiper** *Limicola falcinellus* \*

One was at Lake Ndutu on 20 July 1999. This is an early record for East Africa as most records of this uncommon Palearctic migrant are between August and April (Zimmermann *et al.* 1996).

**Olive Pigeon** *Columba arquatrix* \*

Two birds were observed in Ingila forest in the north of SNP on 2 June 2000 and over three birds on 4 June 2000. The nearest known location for Olive Pigeon is in southwest Kenya (Zimmermann *et al.* 1996).

**Tambourine Dove** *Turtur tympanistria*

One bird was at Lamai guard post in the north of SNP on 9 May 2000. Schmidl (1982) only mentioned records from the Grumeti riverine forest.

**Dusky Turtle Dove** *Streptopelia lugens* \*

One was seen in flight along the road which passes the Musabi Plains in the west of SNP on 24 October 1999. An immature bird was seen in flight by a road in the west of SNP on 18 April 2000. This highland species is known to wander widely (Stevenson & Fanshawe 2002).

**Short-eared Owl** *Asio flammeus*

A bird was flushed on the open plains in the southeast part of SNP on 5 January 2001 and another a day later. This species is a rare winter visitor with just a few scattered records in East Africa (Stevenson & Fanshawe 2002). Previous records for SNP have come from D. Richards and H. van Lawick (Baker *in litt.* 2005).

**African Wood Owl** *Strix woodfordii*

A single bird was seen perched and in flight in a forest along the Mara River in SNP on 16 January 2000. The only previous dated record is from Kempinigati from 1960 (Schmidl 1982), but according to Zimmermann *et al.* (1996) the species is recorded in Mara GR.

**Plain Nightjar** *Caprimulgus inornatus* \*

On 25 and 26 March 2000 single Plain Nightjars were flushed in the north of SNP. Up to five individuals were perched under small bushes and were flushed several times. This intra-african migrant has usually been recorded in Tanzania east of the Rift Valley (Fry *et al.* 1988, Zimmermann *et al.* 1996).

**Madagascar Bee-eater** *Merops superciliosus*

Seven new records were made in SNP mainly from the Western Corridor at Kirawira, Grumeti River, during May and June and in the beginning of September. More than 100 birds were seen on 6 September 1999 and between 30 and 50 birds were resting at Grumeti River on 6 May 2000. Three sightings were made away from the Grumeti River: several birds were seen at the Seronera River on 2 May 1999; three birds were seen on the Serengeti Plains (02°50'S, 35°09'E) on 13 May 2000 and three were seen at the Kenyangaga River on 10 May 2000. Schmidl (1982) only reported one dated record of Madagascar Bee-eater, in August 1974.

**Cinnamon-chested Bee-eater** *Merops oreobates*

On 26 March 2000 two adults and one juvenile bird were seen on the steep slope of the Isuria escarpment north of Kenyangaga guard post. A second record of a single bird was made at the same escarpment on 27 March 2000. The only other Serengeti record of this species was near the Mara River (Schmidl 1982). However this species is distributed in the Mara GR (Zimmermann *et al.* 1996).

**Yellow-rumped Tinkerbird** *Pogoniulus bilineatus*

Two birds were seen at the Isuria escarpment north of Kenyangaga guard post on 26 March 2000. Only one record is given in Schmidl (1982).

**Somali Short-toed Lark** *Calandrella somalica* \*

Although the Somali Short-toed Lark is not reported for SNP I found the species breeding on intermediate grasslands. One bird was feeding young in the east part of the Serengeti plains in May 1999. The species was present on three out of ten grassland study plots in 2000 (Gottschalk *et al.* 2007). The breeding density estimated by territory mapping (Bibby *et al.* 2000) differed between the grasslands. West of Simba Koppie it was 0.4 territories/10 ha, east of Maasai Koppies it was 5.7 territories/10 ha and on the Togora Plains it was 0.8 territories/10 ha.

**Rufous-chested Swallow** *Hirundo semirufa*

Two birds were at the Lamai guard post on 4 February 2000 and additional



single birds north of the Mara River on 3 and 27 February, 14 April and 3 June, all in 2000. Schmidl (1982) gives only two dated records of this species.

### **Blue Swallow** *Hirundo atrocaerulea*

One Blue Swallow was in a swampy grassland north of Mara River on the 5 June 2000. This rare swallow is known to winter in western Kenya and has been recorded once in SNP on 12 August 1994 (Baker & Baker 2002). It is most probably a regular visitor during the non-breeding season to the Mara River valley since there are several more records in the TBAP database (Baker *in litt.* 2005).

### **Pangani Longclaw** *Macronyx aurantiigula*

During the wet season of 1999 and 2000 Pangani Longclaws were widely distributed throughout Serengeti (16 observations of 18 birds) with their main distribution in the long grasslands of the Serengeti Plains. One bird carrying food was seen in grasslands south of the Seronera airstrip on 2 May 1999 and exactly one year later a nest containing three eggs was found in the east of SNP close to the Ngorongoro Conservation Area. The breeding site was within the transition zone between the open plains and the woodlands and was characterized by grassland interspersed by small bushes and single trees. Pangani Longclaw has not been reported breeding in SNP before. According to Baker (*in litt.* 2005, TBAD) the first record of this species for SNP was in March 1998 by P. Roberts. The range of the species is expanding within East Africa.

### **Grey Cuckoo-shrike** *Coracina caesia*

A male and a female were seen south of the Mara GR in the Ingila Forest on 2 June 2000. One observation is reported in Schmidl (1982) from the Grumeti River in August 1970 and according to Zimmermann *et al.* (1996) the species is reported for northwest Mara GR.

### **Cabanis's Greenbul** *Phyllastrephus cabanisi*

Between two and four birds were recorded at Ingila forest in the Mara area in the northern part of SNP on 2 and 4 June 2000. The only other records of this species are from Kittenberger who collected specimens at the Mara River (Schmidl 1982). The next nearest locality is Trans-Mara (Zimmermann *et al.* 1996).

### **Red-capped Robin-Chat** *Cossypha natalensis*

Besides the first Serengeti record at the Grumeti River (Gottschalk 2002) additional birds were seen at Ingila forest in the Mara region. Two birds were observed on 2 June 2000 and an additional one was singing in the same forest on 4 June 2000. The nearest known locality for this species is Mara GR (Zimmermann *et al.* 1996).

### **Eurasian Reed Warbler** *Acrocephalus scirpaceus* \*

One bird was trapped at the forest of the Kenyangaga River on 10 May 2000.

This bird was presumably on northward passage, which takes place up to early May (Urban *et al.* 1997).

**River Warbler** *Locustella fluviatilis* \*

One bird was seen on its northward passage in a bush close to a koppie on the plains of SNP on 10 April 2000. There are only 17 records for Tanzania (Baker *in litt.* 2005, TBAD).

**Little Rush Warbler** *Bradypterus baboecala* \*

This species was recorded two times at Bolongonja Spring forest. One bird was singing in a wet area of the forest on 17 January 2000 though none were found during two further visits in February. However, three were singing in another swamp close to the Bolongonja forest on 9 January 2001. Schmidl (1982) did not note Little Rush Warbler and the next nearest location is the Mara GR (Urban *et al.* 1997, Zimmermann *et al.* 1996).

**Common Whitethroat** *Sylvia communis* \*

A Common Whitethroat was seen in the southeast of SNP on the open plains near a koppie on 16 December 1999. Another bird was observed in a small bush close to the Mara River on 3 February 2000. On 10 April 2000 three were seen at the Barafu Koppie and one bird was recorded on Naabi Hill on 3 March 2006. These records suggest that Common Whitethroat is a rare but regular migrant in Serengeti. Although this Palaearctic bird is a common migrant in the east of the Rift Valley (Baker *in litt.* 2005, TBAD) it has seldom been recorded in the west of the Rift (Urban *et al.* 1997, Zimmermann *et al.* 1996).

**Brown Parisoma** *Parisoma lugens* \*

A single bird was seen at a koppie on the plains in the southeast of SNP on 22 March 2000. Although koppies on the plains were regularly visited this was the only record. The nearest known localities for this species are Loliondo and Norongoro Conservation Area (Baker *in litt.* 2005, TBAD).

**Broad-tailed Warbler** *Schoenicola brevirostris*

In 2000 the species seemed to be common in moist grassland in the Mara region during the wet season. Single birds were recorded in grasslands close to forest edges mainly of the Kenyangaga River and one bird was mist-netted at the Kenyangaga River on 10 May 2000. Away from the north one was seen in lush grasslands on the Musabi Plains in the Western Corridor on 5 June 1999. While Schmidl (1982) mentioned two records of this species for SNP, according to Urban *et al.* (1997) the Broad-tailed Warbler is not found in SNP. However, Zimmermann *et al.* (1996) mentioned the species as not uncommon in Serengeti.

**African Moustached Warbler** *Melocichla mentalis*

This warbler was abundant in long rich grassland throughout the Mara region of SNP. Eight records of 16 birds in total were made in this region during



1999 and 2000. Additionally, one bird was seen north of Seronera, close to the Orangi River on 23 April 2000. Only one bird was seen by Stronach (1990) in 1985.

### **Wailing Cisticola** *Cisticola lais* \*

Wailing Cisticola was regularly recorded on the rocky hills northwest of the Lobo Lodge. One bird was calling on 31 October 1999 and more than four birds were recorded on 14 December 1999. One bird was mist-netted and between two and four were seen at the Klombeti Hills on 11 May 2000. Between two and four birds were counted on 24 April 2000 and on 11 May 2000. Zimmermann *et al.* (1996) mentioned the species for the Gol Mountains, which are located east of SNP.

### **Red-faced Cisticola** *Cisticola erythrops* \*

One Red-faced Cisticola was mist-netted at the edge of the Ingila forest (01°38.12'S, 34°47.97'E) on the 2 June 2000. According to Zimmermann *et al.* (1996) the species should be distributed in SNP, but I found it to be rare and only in the north of the park.

### **Trilling Cisticola** *Cisticola woosnami* \*

This species was a common and sedentary species close to forests or in scattered wooded areas of the Serengeti Mara region ranging from the Isuria escarpment to the Ingila forest. Nine records of 21 birds were made between July 1999 and June 2000. One bird was mist-netted at the edge of the Ingila forest on 2 June 2000 and one adult and two juveniles were seen at Ingila forest on 4 June 2000. Trilling Cisticola is common in northern Tanzania (Baker *in litt.* 2005, TBAD) and in northwest Mara GR (Zimmermann *et al.* 1996).

### **Siffling Cisticola** *Cisticola brachypterus* \*

In 2000, singing Siffling Cisticolas were recorded from several sites, mainly throughout the central and southeast of SNP, always in areas of wooded grassland or grassland at the edges of the woodlands. Between one and seven singing birds were seen in a 25 ha wooded grassland area north of Lobo between January and June 2000. One bird was mist-netted in the same area on the 6 June 2000. 24 birds in 16 different locations were seen in the east of SNP in the transition zone between the plains and the woodlands between 21 January and 8 June 2000. Additional records were made on the Togora and Ndadaka Plains. Although this species was not mentioned for SNP by Zimmermann *et al.* (1996) it is reported from northern Tanzania (Urban *et al.* 1997).

### **Grey-capped Warbler** *Eminia lepida*

This species seems to be restricted to the forest of the Bolongonja Spring in the north of SNP, where it is common. Up to six birds were seen at this location between January 2000 and January 2001. One specimen was mist-netted on 8 January 2001. Schmidl (1982) mentioned only one record, from the Grumeti

River, and according to Urban *et al.* (1997) the Grey-capped Warbler is rare in the Serengeti.

### **Olivaceous Warbler** *Hippolais pallida*

Seven birds were seen on six occasions, mostly in the northern part of SNP between December and March. One bird was mist-netted at the Serengeti Research Institute on 16 March 2000. Only one record is listed in Schmidl (1982).

### **Blackcap** *Sylvia atricapilla*

This palaearctic migrant seems to be very rare in SNP, as I recorded it only once: a pair at the Lobo Hills on 14 December 1999. Schmidl (1982) reported one record in November 1970.

### **Karamoja Apalis** *Apalis karamojae*

One was east of the Seronera Research Centre on May 1999. Others were seen at Togora Plains on 14 July 1999 and on 7 September 1999. This little known species is patchily distributed in Uganda and Tanzania. D. Moyer encountered several groups in SNP in 1993 (Shaw *et al.* 2005). Seven additional records have been made by P. Shaw (*in litt.* 2004) in the Western Corridor of Serengeti on 26 July 2003.

### **Semi-collared Flycatcher** *Ficedula semitorquata* \*

A male was seen and photographed on the Naabi Hill on 3 March 2006. The bird was shy and restless. According to Schmidl (1982) the species has not been recorded before in SNP.

### **Swamp Flycatcher** *Muscicapa aquatica*

This species was seen several times at Kirawira on the Grumeti River camp, including 26 May 1999, 16 July 1999, 28 January 2000, 16 April 2000 and 7 May 2000. This small flycatcher is a common bird around Lake Victoria though Schmidl (1982) mentioned only one record of two birds in SNP.

### **African Blue-Flycatcher** *Elminia longicauda* \*

One was seen in a small gallery forest along the Kenyangaga River on 25 and 26 of March 2000. This species is restricted in Tanzania to the northwest (Urban *et al.* 1997).

### **Red-chested Sunbird** *Cinnyris erythrocerca*

A male was at the Grumeti River camp in the western part of SNP on 16 July 1999 and 17 March 2000. According to Fry *et al.* (2000) this species is restricted within northern Tanzania to the shores of Lake Victoria.

### **Collared Sunbird** *Anthreptes collaris*

I saw the species ten times in total in the Mara forests, in the Bolongonja forest and in the riverine forests of the Grumeti and Mbalageti Rivers. Only one record is mentioned by Schmidl (1982).



**Woodchat Shrike** *Lanius senator* \*

A male was seen and photographed on a small bush southeast of Seronera on 28 April 2000. This was the second record for Tanzania (Baker *in litt.* 2000). Another male was seen and photographed south of the Seronera air strip on 24 February 2005. Most records from western Kenya are between October and March. However, there are late records from Uganda in mid April and from northeast Zaire in late April (Fry *et al.* 2000).

**Marsh Tchagra** *Tchagra minuta*

A male Marsh Tchagra was recorded on 27 March 2000 north of the Mara River and close to the Isuria escarpment. The bird was singing from rank vegetation along a dry stream. Schmidl (1982) mentioned two records of this species from the Grumeti River and Fry *et al.* (2000) mentioned the bird only for the northern Serengeti.

**Yellow White-eye** *Zosterops senegalensis*

This species seems to be scarce in well-forested or wooded areas especially in the Mara region. Away from this area one bird was at Kimasi on 26 October 1999 and one at the Isuria escarpment north of Kenyangaga guard post on 26 March 2000. Two were mist-netted in the Ingila forest on 2 June 2000. Only one record is listed in Schmidl (1982) at the Orangi River in June 1970.

**Chestnut Weaver** *Ploceus rubiginosus* \*

A pair was displaying in grasslands south of Seronera on 30 April 2000. According to Schmidl (1982) and Zimmermann *et al.* (1996) the species is absent from SNP and the entire north of Tanzania. However the status of the species has changed in recent years and now it is locally abundant and breeding in northern Tanzania (Baker *in litt.* 2005, TBAP).

**Grosbeak Weaver** *Amblyospiza albifrons*

One was in a swamp north of the Mara River on 27 March 2000. The only published record of this species is an individual seen north of SNP (Schmidl 1982).

**Little Weaver** *Ploceus luteolus*

On the 24 October 1999 a male and two females were in trees at the Grumeti River, Kirawira. The only other record of this species is from northern SNP near the Kenya border (Fry *et al.* 2004).

**Parasitic Weaver** *Anomalospiza imberbis*

A single bird was seen in moist grassland on the Musabi Plains on 27 May 1999 and on 1 April 2000. Another was seen at the Raho dam on 15 January 2000. Schmidl (1982) mentioned only three dated records from moist grasslands.

**Red-collared Widowbird** *Euplectes ardens*

Between two and three males were observed in grasslands close to the Kenyangaga River on 10 May 2004. Although the Red-collared Widowbird

is known from Mara GR (Fry *et al.* 2004), Schmidl (1982) mentioned only one record for SNP, from the Tarina River in March 1952.

### **Red-headed Quelea** *Quelea erythrops*

Two males and several females were in the Western Corridor on the Ndabaka Plains on 29 May 2000. Schmidl (1982) listed two undated records for SNP although the distribution map in Fry *et al.* (2004) does not show these records.

### **Southern Citril** *Serinus hypostictus* \*

On the 26 March 2000 two birds were singing at the Isuria escarpment north of Kenyangaga guard post at the Kenyan border. Three more Southern Citrils were observed at the same escarpment on 27 March 2000. The species could not be found elsewhere in SNP.

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# Nesting records of the Scaly-breasted Illadopsis *Illadopsis albipectus* in Uganda

Jeremy A. Lindsell, Kennedy Andama, Raimon Ogen and Geoffrey Okethuwengu

The Scaly-breasted Illadopsis is a common resident of forest in central and eastern Africa. Lindsell (2001) found it occurring at densities of 36–46 territories/km<sup>2</sup> in western Uganda. Despite this and the geographical range including some well-studied sites (e.g. Kakamega Forest, western Kenya and the forests of Uganda), there is only one published record of breeding in this species, from Kibale Forest in Uganda (Butynski 1989). We report here details from a further eight nests found in Budongo Forest, western Uganda, in 1999 and 2000, and give the first description of the nestling. Information on nest construction, location and clutch are compared with those of the very similar Blackcap Illadopsis *I. cleaveri* of western Africa.

## Study site and methods

The Budongo Forest Reserve is situated in western Uganda between 01°37'N–02°03'N and 31°22'E–31°46'E. The reserve covers an area of 793 km<sup>2</sup> that includes 428 km<sup>2</sup> of moist, semi-deciduous forest that naturally tends towards monodominance of *Cynometra alexandri* (Eggeling 1947). Maximum temperature peaks in January and February at 30–35° C, whilst remaining relatively constant throughout the rest of the year at around 25° C. Mean annual rainfall for 1993–1999 was 1680 mm and had two peaks, one in April and May and the other in September to November (Figure 1).

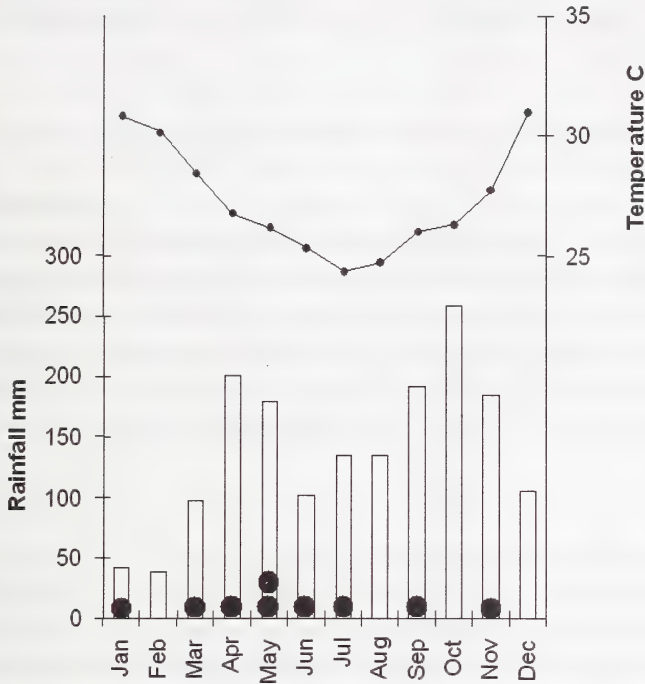
Nests were found by chance during the course of other fieldwork in the forest. Nests were hard to detect and were usually only discovered when they were adjacent to a well-used footpath: seven of the eight nests were within 3 m of a research trail. They were usually found when an adult was detected moving quietly away as the observer moved along a trail. No nests were discovered as a result of deliberate searches (c. 75 h of searching) though one nest was located whilst following a radio-tagged adult female.

## Results

### *Nesting dates*

A total of eight nests were found, distributed as follows: March (1), April (1), May (2), June (1), July (1), September (1) and November (1) (Figure 1). In addition, a recent fledgling was caught in mid-February implying nesting at the end of January or beginning of February.





**Figure 1.** Mean monthly rainfall in mm and maximum temperature in °C at Sonso, Budongo Forest, for years 1993–1999 (data from Budongo Forest Project). Nest records for each month are shown as filled circles at the bottom of the graph.

### *Nest site locations*

All nests were on the ground. Three nests were positioned at the base of small trees (20–30 cm dbh, *Celtis* spp.), one was positioned on sloping ground beside a small dead branch lying on the ground and four were in open leaf litter with little herbaceous cover around. Three of these nest locations were exposed to light patches on the forest floor caused by small openings in the canopy.

### *Nest construction*

All nests were of very similar construction being an open cup built of dead leaves and lined with strands of fungus and rootlets, with an internal diameter of 60–70 mm, and an internal depth 40–50 mm. The body of the nest was set down into the leaf litter so that the cup itself was all that was visible, the rim of the cup being level with the surface of the leaf litter.

### *Eggs*

Six nests contained eggs with clutch size being two in every case. The eggs were white (sometimes with a rosy tint) with dark rufous-brown blotches. Markings varied with some eggs having large blotches that contrasted

sharply with the background, and others with less distinct fine speckling of a lighter colour. Three eggs weighed 3.8, 4.4 and 4.6 g and measured 24 x 16, 22 x 16 and 23 x 16 mm.

*Nestlings*

The nestlings in one nest (probably about 8 days old, see below) had the head and back covered with mid-grey-brown down. The pins on the wings were slate grey and were just breaking, showing brown tips. Around the collar the pins were black with orangey bases. The pins on the flanks were cream grading to orange on the sides of the breast. The vent and belly were unfeathered. The bill was grey, the gape yellow and the iris dark blackish-brown (juvenile irides are pale grey and of older birds are warm brown).

Weight gains of the chicks in two nests are shown in Table 1. Evidence from these two nests suggested that the young probably left the nest on day eleven after hatching.

**Nest survival**

Of the eight nests, one was found before the clutch was laid and it was not subsequently used. One nest was discovered at the nestling stage and six nests were discovered at the egg stage. Of the seven active nests, two clutches were subsequently deserted, three clutches were predated, one clutch hatched and the chicks were probably predated and the nest with nestlings appeared to fledge successfully. In one nest there was a third egg that was distinctly different from the other two and is presumed to be that of a cuckoo. Several species of cuckoo were common in the vicinity. This egg disappeared without trace after the illadopsis eggs had hatched.

**Table 1.** Weight changes in four *I. albipectus* nestlings.

Days since hatching	Chick 1	Chick 2	Chick 3	Chick 4
5	13.5	11.4		
7	15.9	13.5		
8			17.1	15.2
10			21.7	19

*Adult behaviour associated with nests*

Males continued territorial singing when they had eggs or nestlings in the nest. Two birds, and possibly three, were observed to feed one brood. When the chicks were newly hatched, adults brooded the chicks between food deliveries. In one case, a mass of adult feathers was found beside a nest containing two eggs. The eggs were left untouched for one further day before disappearing themselves. It is likely that the adult was predated whilst incubating.

As part of other research, a total of 700 days of radio-tracking of territory-



holding adult male *I. albipectus* were conducted ( $n = 45$ ), covering all months from September to May. On no occasion did these birds reveal the location of a nest. However, one female was tracked and within 3 days of fitting the tag this bird was found on a nest incubating two eggs. These observations collectively suggest that incubation was mostly undertaken by females.

## Discussion

Despite the abundance of *I. albipectus*, it clearly has a cryptic breeding strategy. During detailed nest searching in Kibale Forest, western Uganda, which resulted in some 126 nests of 39 species being located, none of *I. albipectus* were found (Dranzoa 1995). The sole previous nest record was from Kibale Forest in November (Butynski 1989). That nest was also built on the ground and contained two eggs. Specimen data indicate breeding condition birds in June (Central African Republic); Jan-Feb, Apr-Jul, Oct-Nov (DRC); Aug-Nov (Sudan); and Apr-May, Nov (Uganda); with juveniles noted in May, July, November and December. These records cover almost every month of the year (all data from Fry *et al.* 2000). Dranzoa (1998) observed that 24 % of *I. albipectus* caught in Kibale Forest were in breeding condition (judged by brood patch or cloacal protuberance), but dates were not indicated. These records and the current observations emphasise the long breeding season for this species. Birds sing and maintain their territories all year round so it seems likely that they could breed in any month.

Since this is a highly terrestrial species (Fry *et al.* 2000), it may be expected that the young leave the nest early and are attended on the ground by the adults away from the nest. Brown Illadopsis *I. fulvescens* chicks were in the nest for 14 days ( $n = 1$ ) and Pale-breasted Illadopsis *I. rufipennis* for 10 days (Fry *et al.* 2000).

These observations permit comparison with Blackcap Illadopsis *I. cleaveri* of western Africa. Chappuis (2000) speculated that *I. cleaveri* and *I. albipectus* are conspecific on the basis of similarity in vocalisations. The natural history of *I. cleaveri* is better known than *I. albipectus* (Brosset & Erard 1986) with data from seven nests found in Gabon. The description of the nest construction matches that of *I. albipectus*, but the positioning differs a little: one *I. cleaveri* nest was 15 cm above the ground and they were slightly raised, whereas all *I. albipectus* nests were sunk down so that the rim of the nest was flush with the surrounding leaf litter. Three of eight *I. albipectus* nests in Budongo were placed at the base of small trees, but no such information is mentioned for *I. cleaveri*. The description of the eggs of *I. cleaveri* matches that for *I. albipectus* including shape and dimensions (*I. cleaveri* mean =  $24 \times 17$  mm,  $n = 10$ ). Clutch size was the same (always two). Incubation in *I. cleaveri* was by the female only and observations for *I. albipectus* suggested the same, though this remains to be confirmed. Avoidance behaviour by the incubating bird was similar, with both species quietly disappearing across the forest floor. Interestingly, Brosset & Erard (1986) also recorded brood parasitism of

*I. cleaveri* by a cuckoo (possibly Red-chested Cuckoo *Cuculus solitarius*) in one of seven nests. The similarity of these observations suggests that these two species are very closely related indeed.

### Acknowledgements

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# Toro Olive Greenbul *Phyllastrephus hypochloris*: a new record for Tanzania with a description of its song

Carolyn McBride

On a trip to Minziro Forest Reserve in northwest Tanzania in July 2000, I tape-recorded, observed, and mist-netted a Toro Olive Greenbul *Phyllastrephus hypochloris*. Although this species is known from Kakamega Forest in western Kenya, and from forests in west and southern Uganda (including Malibigambo Forest, adjacent to Minziro on the Ugandan side of the border), this is the first record of the Toro Olive Greenbul within Tanzania (Keith *et al.* 1992, Friedmann & Williams 1969, Scott 1993). Here I describe the species's vocalisation in detail and clarify inaccurate published descriptions and a misidentified recording of its call.

## Observation

On the morning of 26 July 2000, in a heavily disturbed area of seasonally-inundated swamp forest within Minziro Forest Reserve (01°08'S, 31°29'E), I heard two unknown greenbuls calling from dense undergrowth within 2 m of the ground. One of the birds gave a series of churring scolds while the other answered with short 1-2-syllable notes of the same quality and pitch. The calls were surprisingly similar to those of Fischer's Greenbul *Phyllastrephus fischeri*, an East African coastal endemic unknown from so far inland. I approached close enough to tape-record the vocalisations and drew one of the birds into view through playback. Like many greenbuls, the bird lacked distinctive markings. It was dull olive, darker above and lighter below, with a slightly brownish tail and reddish eye. Although its colour and size bore a strong resemblance to Cameroon Sombre Greenbul *Andropadus curvirostris* (common at Minziro), the bill was noticeably longer and thinner than that of most *Andropadus* species. Suspecting that the bird might be a Toro Olive Greenbul, I returned to the same location the following day and caught it using a mist-net and a tape lure.

## Description

The captured bird was examined closely and identified as a Toro Olive Greenbul by several members of my party (including Liz Baker, Marc Baker and Terry Oatley). Photographs were taken. We made the following description, which matches that of Keith *et al.* (1992) except where italicized:

Bare parts: Bill black with pale olive gape. *Eye rusty brown*. Legs and feet slaty bluish-grey with dull yellow soles. *Claws bluish-grey*.

Head: Tops and sides of head brownish olive-green, *lores greyish*. Cheeks and ear-coverts with narrow grey streaks. Chin and throat pale grey with slight yellow wash.

Upperparts and wings: Back olive-green becoming gingery on rump. Upper tail-coverts dull rufous. Primaries and secondaries dark brown, broadly edged olive-green. Axillaries olive and underwing-coverts pale lemon yellow.

Underparts: Generally lighter than upperparts with pale olive colour and indistinct yellow streaks. Flanks a little darker and *greener*. Centre of belly paler and yellower.

Tail: *bronzy olive-green tinged dark reddish brown* and narrowly edged greenish.

### Voice

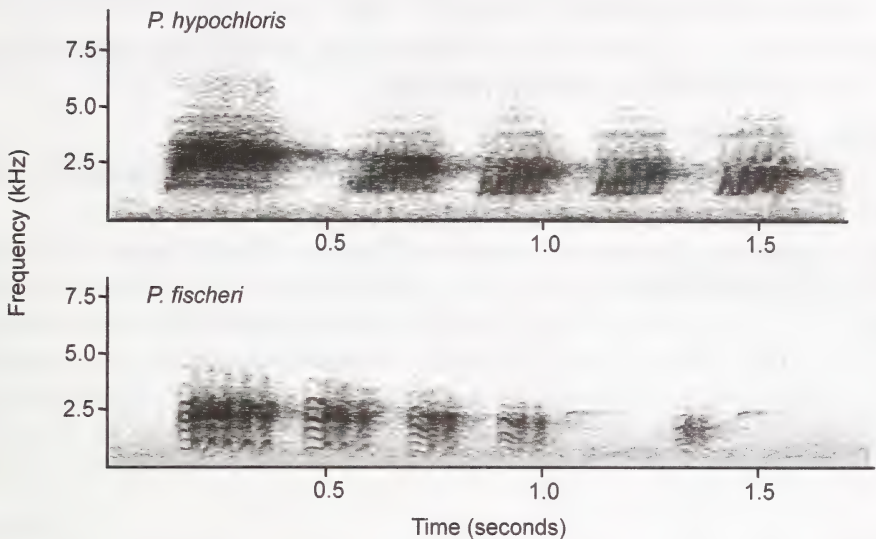
Recordings were made on 26 and 27 July and 3 and 28 August 2000 (all recordings archived at Macaulay Library of Natural Sounds, Cornell Laboratory of Ornithology; catalog # 107716, 107717, 107730, 107775, and 107844). The birds always gave the same type of vocalisation—a variable number of short gurgly or scolding churrs strung together in a series. The first syllable was typically the loudest, highest, and longest, and was followed, after a very brief pause, by 2–9 progressively shorter and slightly lower syllables, given in quick succession. In some instances, particularly in response to playback, the calling bird would add 2–3 more separated, purer, liquid, but still gurgling final notes.

The chattering quality and variable syntax of this vocalisation are characteristic of several other East African *Phyllastrephus* greenbuls, including, Terrestrial *P. terrestris* and Northern Brownbuls *P. strepitans*, Cabanis's *P. cabanisi* and Icterine Greenbuls *P. icterinus* and, especially, Fischer's Greenbul. The vocalisation of Fischer's Greenbul even includes the same stereotypical loud, high, long first syllable followed by a scolding series of shorter, quieter, descending syllables (see Figure 1 for comparison). My experience recording these other *Phyllastrephus* species suggests that the variation in Toro Olive Greenbul vocalisations may form a continuum from 1–3-syllable contact calls to 5–10-syllable mating/territorial 'songs' characterized by the purer, brighter and more liquid final syllables.

### Discussion

Almost all of the previously published recordings and descriptions of Toro Olive Greenbul vocalizations (Keith *et al.* 1992, Zimmerman *et al.* 1996, and Chappuis 2000) are based on one misidentified recording and are therefore inaccurate (but see Stevenson & Fanshawe 2002 for an accurate description). This recording, made by A.R. Gregory in western Kenya, features a bird giving a short and clipped 'titwah' rapidly repeated 2–12 times and often preceeded by a shrill chatter. While the recording was made in western Kenya, and song dialects sometimes vary geographically, the vocalizations of Toro Olive





**Figure 1.** Sonograms of the remarkably similar *P. hypochloris* and *P. fischeri* vocalisations. Both begin with a loud, high, and long first syllable followed in quick succession by several progressively shorter, lower syllables.

Greenbul in western Kenya do not seem to differ significantly from those of northwest Tanzania. In September 2000, I encountered a small group of 2–3 greenbuls in Kakamega Forest (where *P. hypochloris* is known to occur) whose behavior and vocalisations matched those recorded in Minziro the month before. The bird in the recording of A.R. Gregory is almost certainly a Little Greenbul *Andropadus virens* (pers. obs., C. Chappuis pers. comm.).

### Acknowledgements

I am grateful to the Tanzania Commission for Science and Technology for permission to conduct research and record birds in Minziro Forest Reserve, to the UNDP-GEF and Fulbright Foundation for financial support, and to the Bakers for their warm hospitality, advice, and the invitation to join their ringing expedition during my first three weeks in Minziro.

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# Sooty Shearwater *Puffinus griseus*: a new species for eastern Africa

Colin Jackson & Simon Valle

On Sunday 30 May 2004, SV found the corpse of a seabird on the beach in front of the Mwamba Bird Observatory and Field Study Centre, Watamu. The specimen was identified as a shearwater from a combination of its dark black-brown colour, size, long narrow wings and long, slender 'tube nose'. A full description was taken along with various measurements which indicated that this species was a Sooty Shearwater *Puffinus griseus*, a first record for eastern African waters.

## Description

*Upperparts*: The flesh of the head and neck had been eaten away to the bone leaving just a tuft of dark blackish feathers on the forehead. Mantle, scapulars, back and rump mainly dark grey-black with some pale patches formed by the tips of very worn back and scapular feathers.

*Upperwing*: Rather uniform dark brown-black, with outer primaries somewhat browner due to significant wear, particularly at the tips. Primaries p9 and p10 (numbered ascendantly) were new and p8 at stage '4' of moult (after Ginn & Melville 1983). These three primaries were black-based in colour with a silvery-grey 'wash' towards the centre and contrasted strongly with the old, very worn and brown primaries p1-p7. All secondaries old and worn.

*Tail*: Slightly rounded. Tail colour grey-black, the 'grey' due to wear, with the outer feathers worn almost to the point of being white, though darker where protected by the uppertail coverts. Underside of tail slightly greyer than above and almost completely covered by the long under tail coverts.

*Underparts*: Breast and belly ashy grey, very slightly darker on the flanks and darkening more significantly on the lower belly, crissum and under tail coverts. Feathers very worn with pale tips and some quite brown in colour, giving the underparts a slightly mottled appearance.

*Underwing*: The inner lesser and median coverts were a dark, smoky grey with the first few inner greater coverts being a lighter grey. The lesser coverts up to the carpal joint were mid brown-grey with worn, paler edges and dark shafts. The proximal median coverts were pale grey with a tinge of yellow - possibly from contamination - fading to almost pure white at the carpal joint and merging with white lower primary coverts to form a distinctive

silvery-white panel. The greater coverts were light grey, though darker than the median coverts, forming a dark trailing edge adjacent to the white panel. Upper primary coverts large and creamy white with darker grey bases and dark shafts overlaying pale grey outer primary coverts. The under surface of the old primaries was light grey, clearly darker than the white coverts and giving the wing a dark tip and trailing edge along the 'hand'. The new primaries were also grey but clearly darker than the adjacent old ones.

*Bare parts:* Bill long, slender, uniformly black. Feet with dark blackish outer toes, mid grey inner toes with a tinge of pink and paler webbing. Feet (including the claws) projected beyond the tail tip by 32 mm. Tarsus clearly two-toned with inner edge pale grey and outer edge dark slate grey. Claws black.

*Measurements:* Wing = 305 mm (straightened, flattened chord measurement, though note the primaries were abraded); head (bill + skull) = 100.7 mm; tarsus (centre of tibio-tarsal joint to first scale of tarsus above wrist joint) = 61.4 mm; bill (upper culmen to feathering) = 42.5 mm; toe plus claw (to back of folded 'wrist') = 73.5 mm; toe plus claw (to end of toe bone) = 70.3 mm; tail = 85 mm; body length = 46 mm; wing span = 1020 mm.

*Age:* Given the extremely worn plumage of the bird and that the breeding season of this species extends up to May, it is safe to assume that this was an adult bird. A young bird would still be in fresh plumage by this date.

## Discussion

Wedge-tailed *Puffinus pacificus* and Flesh-footed Shearwaters *P. carneipes* are two all-dark shearwaters found in eastern African waters. Flesh-footed Shearwater has a pale horn bill with black tip and pink feet and Wedge-tailed Shearwater has a long tail which extends beyond the pale flesh-white feet; and neither species has a white underwing. Audubon's Shearwater *P. lherminieri*, the commonest shearwater in eastern African waters, does have a white underwing, but it is a purer white and this colour extends onto the belly. Audubon's Shearwater is also a much smaller species. Both Short-tailed *P. tenuirostris* and Sooty Shearwater show a pale underwing. Short-tailed Shearwater, however, has a pale grey underwing as opposed to white, a greyer head and a shorter bill. By contrast, the current specimen showed a dark blackish tuft of feathers on the forehead (not grey), strong white underwings and a long bill. According to Harrison (1983) Short-tailed Shearwater is up to 43 cm in length with a wing span of up to 100 cm, somewhat smaller than this specimen (46 cm and 102 cm respectively).

Sooty Shearwaters breed off the southern tip of South America with a few small colonies off south-western Australia and Tasmania and larger colonies off New Zealand (Harrison 1983). They spend the non-breeding season in the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans and apparently tend to avoid warmer tropical



waters preferring the colder ones (Harrison 1983). The Indian Ocean, being warm, is therefore not where this species would be expected to occur. Indeed, there have been no records within the Indian Ocean north of South Africa except for seven records off the United Arab Emirates (Gantlett 2003). These records have prompted speculation that there may be a small passage of Sooty Shearwaters northwards across the Indian Ocean (Harrison 1983), which would likely take them past the East African coast. However, even seven records hardly constitutes evidence of a regular passage and an individual wandering from southern waters would seem to be the most likely explanation for the current record.

Watamu experienced unusually strong and persistent south-easterly winds for a period of two months prior to the corpse being found and some heavy storms in the week prior. It is possible that this bird was caught in a storm at sea eventually being blown ashore by the prevailing wind. We estimate that the corpse was about one week old when found and that it could have been carried c.80–100 kms in this time, putting it at c. 60–80 kms off Mtwapa, or thereabouts, when it died.

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## Short communications

### The Miombo Scrub Robin *Cercotrichas barbata* in Tanzania: a note on distribution and breeding

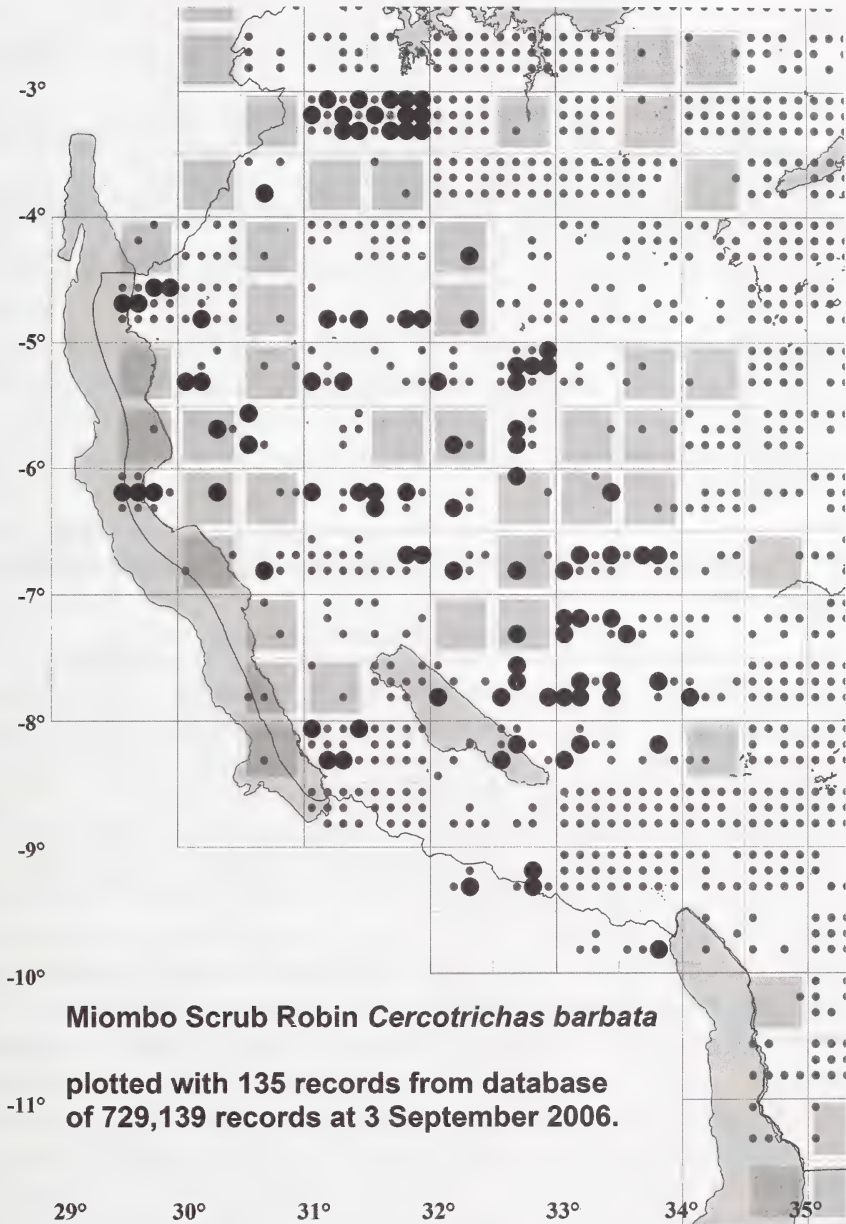
The Miombo Scrub Robin *Cercotrichas barbata* was described by Britton (1980) as "A local and rather uncommon resident of thick undergrowth in rich miombo woodland and riverine forest at about 1000–1500 m in W Tanzania, from Tukuyu northwest to Kigoma (at Busondo and Nzilandagaza)." Brown & Britton (1980), who provided the first comprehensive summary of the breeding patterns of East African species, listed this species in their category 2 which included species "for which there is no definite East African breeding record". The map in Keith *et al.* (1992) shows a narrow distribution in Tanzania along south-western and western borders with Malawi, Zambia, Lake Tanganyika and Burundi.

As of 1 September 2006 there were 135 records for this species in the Tanzania Bird Atlas Project database (Baker & Baker in prep. *The birds of Tanzania: an atlas of distribution and seasonality*. <http://tanzaniabirdatlas.com>). These amounted to 96 plots for the country, with each plot being a month's record for a given atlas square (see Figure 1). The easternmost records for this species in Tanzania are from Ruaha N.P. within atlas square 3407C (see Figure 1 for explanation of atlas squares). Its range may extend slightly further east as the limit of the western Miombo extends to about 36°E.

Only 14 of the records in the database have altitude data. From these, the lower elevation limit for this species is at 610 m along the Songwe River that flows east to Lake Nyassa along the international boundary with Malawi. The upper limit is around 1650 m in 3006A to the east of Mahale Mts N.P.

In common with most insectivorous bird species found in miombo, the breeding season of Miombo Scrub Robin is in the late dry season and beginning of the rains. This is when leaves in the miombo woodlands first appear and there is an abundance of insect food to feed the young. There are eleven breeding records from Zambia (Benson *et al.* 1973) being August (2), September (4), October (3), and November (2). On 21 November 1990 an adult was seen feeding a recently fledged young bird at Tanda Mbuga in 3108A. Thus, egg laying was most probably in late October. On 24 November 2005, Lasse Lindstrom found a nest containing 3 eggs in open miombo woodland on the western bank of the Gombe River (04°32'43"S, 31°53'07"E). The nest was c. 2.1 m high in the broken stump of a small tree. These two observations constitute the first breeding records for this species from Tanzania.





**Figure 1.** Current distribution of Miombo Scrub Robin *Cercotrichas barbata* in Tanzania. Each circle indicates the month within the square from January (top left) to December (bottom right). Squares shaded grey are those considered underworked. Small circles show records for the ubiquitous Yellow-vented Bulbul *Pycnonotus barbatus* which is used to indicate extent of coverage. A square with no record for this species is considered underworked. Each square is a quarter degree square. It is named by the line of longitude to its west and the line of latitude to its north. A, B, C and D denote its position within the degree square starting top left and working left to right.

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## Range extension for Swamp flycatcher *Muscicapa aquatica* in Tanzania

The Swamp Flycatcher *Muscicapa aquatica* is a locally common bird of papyrus swamps and some riverine habitats. It has a wide distribution from northwest Africa, through central Africa to East Africa, south through west Tanzania into northern Zambia (Britton 1980, Urban *et al.* 1997). In Tanzania it is well known from the Lake Victoria basin and presumed to be a local breeder around Lake Victoria and in appropriate habitat around Lake Sagara. It is known from Gombe and Mahale National Parks on the eastern side of Lake Tanganyika (Britton 1980, Tanzania Bird Atlas [www.tanzaniabirdatlas.com](http://www.tanzaniabirdatlas.com)). It may be widespread and frequent in the Lake Tanganyika basin where scarcity of records could be explained by low observer coverage.

In 2005, as part of the Tanzania National Waterbird count, we surveyed Lake Kitangiri (04°07'S, 34°32'E), a small shallow lake of approximately 12 000 ha (Baker & Baker 2002). This lake is situated in the Wembere drainage system west of the Mbulu highlands, about 240 km southeast of Mwanza. On the afternoon of 15 January we visited an extensive system of swamp and marsh on the east side of the lake, dominated by tall *Typha* and *Cyperus*. Along a channel bordered on one side by *Typha* and on the other by a field of aquatic grass (*Diplachne fusca*) we observed a single Swamp Flycatcher perched on a broken *Typha* reed. Its brown upperparts and white belly and throat separated by a brown breast band confirmed its identification, these characteristics according most closely with the race *infulata*. The bird swooped twice to forage from the water surface, returning to its perch in typical flycatcher fashion.

This observation extends the range of Swamp Flycatcher about 85 km south-eastwards from previous sightings, including a recent breeding



record at Mwadui Dam, Shinyanga Region (S. Swift, 1998, in Tanzania Bird Atlas). Together with the Mwadui dam record it confirms that the range is not restricted in Tanzania to the Great Lakes Basin but extends southward, presumably through connecting drainage systems. One might speculate that the Manonga River, a perennial tributary of the Sibiti River and a major source of Lake Kitangiri, might function as a corridor for dispersal to the Kitangire area. It would be of interest to search for this species along the Manonga and Sibiti rivers.

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# Two new East African birds: Black-collared Eremomela and Chestnut-mantled Sparrow-weaver

The presences of Black-collared Eremomela *Eremomela atricollis* (Sylviidae) and Chestnut-mantled Sparrow-Weaver *Plocepasser rufoscapulatus* (Ploceidae) in Tanzania are reported here apparently for the first time. Both are endemic birds of the miombo (*Brachystegia-Julbernardia*) woodland belt of south-central Africa, having been previously recorded only from Angola, southern Congo and northern Zambia (Hall & Moreau 1970, Van Perlo 1995). The following observations indicate that Tanzanian birds likewise appear to be confined to miombo woodland. Both records have been accepted by the East African Rarities Committee.

## Black-collared Eremomela

### Location

A single bird was found in a mixed bird party, and a party of three birds found foraging on their own, seen only a few minutes apart from each other on 1 February 2002, in Sumbawanga District, Rukwa Region at or near 08° 19.73'S, 31° 15.94'E. The habitat was miombo woodland in hilly upland country, at an

altitude of c.1754 m. This is apparently a very scarce bird in this area since in seven days' exploration round my camp site about 4 km to the south of the above point and 150 m lower in altitude, I saw no further birds. Green-capped Eremomela *Eremomela scotops* was common throughout the area at both high and low elevations. A single Yellow-bellied Eremomela *E. icteropygialis* was also noted close to the spot where the *E. atricollis* were seen. Thus as many as three eremomela species may be present together in this one area at the same time.

### Description

Upperparts greyish to grey-green, the impression of green perhaps owing to reflected light from foliage; forehead distinctly paler. A wide black bar through the eye; above this a yellow bar of equal width and length. Underparts, divided neatly into an upper, yellow throat to chin portion and a lower, white breast to belly separated by a black breast band that was widest in the centre and tapered towards the sides where it joined up with the posterior ends of the black eye bars; the width of the breast band varied somewhat as the bird shuffled its feathers. Legs, blackish.

### Voice

Nothing definite was heard. A harsh grating noise, monotonously repeated, as well as a fainter, more musical note which may have been a contact call, were heard coming from the canopy of a tree in which a party of three birds were foraging.

## Chestnut-mantled Sparrow-Weaver

### Location

The records were made in a stretch of woodland along the Mpanda-Inyonga road, where it crosses the Uruwira plateau, between kms 52 and 68, Mpanda District, Rukwa Region. The first sightings were on 15 July 2001 and the latest on 12 February 2002. The corresponding points were 06° 26.76'S, 31° 27.97'E and 06° 27.08'S, 31° 36.71'E. The habitat was high miombo woodland in level country, at an altitude of c.1300 m. Curiously, one of the miombo dominants here was *Brachystegia microphylla*, a tree more usually associated with mountain tops and rocky ridges. The particular combination of bird, tree and geography is thus somewhat unusual. This bird was found to be quite common within this restricted range.

### Description

Top of head black. A wide black stripe through and just above the eye; a white stripe between the black areas and narrower than the lower stripe; a black line from the lower corner of the bill to the side of the neck. Upperparts dark brown, mantle chestnut. Wing with two white bars, the upper one broader. Underparts, pale. Tail with a central terminal notch. Bill, pale horn colour.

### Voice

The call was a high-pitched trill, “trrrrrt”, repeated often and usually the first sign of the species’ presence. The song, heard once, was a rich medley of silvery trills, suggestive of a sunbird.

### Behaviour

Seen in small groups of three to four (up to six) birds, often with other species in mixed bird parties. Fed on the ground, taking to trees when disturbed. Often seen sitting inactive in high branches. A disused nest was at a height of about 4 m on a branch of a small understory tree. In general appearance and construction it was like that of White-browed Sparrow-Weaver *Plocepasser mahali*.

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## Cape Shoveler *Anas smithii* the first record for Tanzania

On 9 October 1997 we were counting waterbirds on one of our local wetlands 2 km south of Boma Ng’ombe, west Kilimanjaro, when we found a Cape Shoveler *Anas smithii*. We had clear but distant views through a 30x telescope and returned the following day to photograph the bird. The record has been accepted by the East African Rarities Committee as the first for Tanzania.

The wetlands are ephemeral, fed by the south-western foothills of Mt. Kilimanjaro. On the day there were nearly 500 waterbirds of 31 species present amongst much emergent and floating vegetation. It is unusual for these pools to hold water as late as October but the previous long rains had been heavier and later than normal. The shoveler was not associating with any other waterbirds and none of the other species present were unusual for the locality.

There are no collections of exotic waterbirds in Tanzania and none can be traced in Kenya so the likelihood that this bird had escaped from captivity seems remote. As a breeding species in southern Africa the Cape Shoveler is more or less confined to fresh water habitats. Peak laying in Zimbabwe, the nearest breeding population to Tanzania, is July–September (Hockey *et al.* 2005). The species is described as nomadic and subject to restlessness (Brown *et al.* 1982). It is a rare visitor to Zambia between May and November with



only 6 acceptable records (Leonard 1999, Dowsett *et al.* in prep. *The Birds of Zambia*) and none further north than 15° S. The current record roughly doubles the distance that past vagrants to Zambia have wandered.

What was almost certainly the same bird was observed in Arusha National Park (30 km to the northwest) the following week. Daudi Maige, a park ranger, submitted this record to the Tanzania Bird Atlas (Baker & Baker in prep. *Birds of Tanzania: an atlas of distribution and seasonality* <http://tanzaniabirdatlas.com>) without knowledge of our sighting

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A photograph of this bird was published in *Scopus* 24, p54 (editor).

## Caspian Plover *Charadrius asiaticus* feeding grounds in northern Tanzania

Caspian Plover *Charadrius asiaticus* is currently evaluated as a species of least concern ([www.iucnredlist.org](http://www.iucnredlist.org), accessed November 2006) with a world population estimate of 40 000–55 000 individuals (Delany & Scott 2002). Caspian Plover breeds in Central Asia and migrates to southern Asia and Africa for the winter (Urban *et al.* 1986, Maclean 1988). The Serengeti short grass plains have long been recognised as possibly the most important winter feeding grounds for Caspian Plover in East Africa (Britton 1980, Urban *et al.* 1986, Baker 1995, Zimmerman *et al.* 1996), but adjacent grasslands may be equally, if not more, important.

Between 10 and 14 January 2005, we counted 1678 Caspian Plovers in the Eyasi Basin of northern Tanzania during the Tanzania waterbird census. We counted 533 Caspian Plovers feeding on short grass plains in the Yaida Valley (03°51'S, 34°47'E) on 10 January and a further two flocks numbering 545 and 600 feeding on two of the Matala short grass plains (03°51'34"S, 34°47'15"E) between 12 and 14 January 2005.

398 Caspian Plovers counted on the southeast side of Lake Eyasi in 1995 (Baker 1995) were assumed to be using the shallow waters of the lake as a safe

roosting site, but feeding was believed to take place to the west of Lake Eyasi on the Serengeti short grass plains. The results of our 2005 census indicate that the Eyasi Basin provides important feeding areas for wintering populations of Caspian Plovers as well, with much larger flock sizes than those reported previously (Britton 1980, Urban *et al.* 1986, Maclean 1988). Notably, the 1 % of population threshold for Caspian Plover congregations is 480 birds (Delany & Scott 2002).

Our observations indicated that Caspian Plovers preferred short grassy plains with a high percentage of bare ground, especially in areas which remained wet from recent rains. Closer examination at Matala revealed a soil which was a brown, heavy vertisol clay and prone to periodic inundation. The grassland was dominated by a short leafy *Panicum* sp. with total ground cover of about 20 % and extensive but discrete bare patches several metres across. Harvester termites (*Hodotermitidae*) and ants were abundant, a documented food of Caspian Plover (Maclean 1988), along with spiders and other predatory insects. Heavy grazing pressure by cattle and sheep was clearly evident, but there was a green flush and the soil was still wet from recent rain.

Wildebeest and cattle show considerable overlap of grazing niche. As non-selective grazing ruminants, both seek out a short grass sward that is relatively homogeneous and of high nutritive value. We suggest that wildebeest on the Serengeti plains and cattle on the plains of Yaida and Matala in the Eyasi Basin both create and maintain optimal feeding habitat for species such as Caspian Plovers.

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## Recent range expansion of Chiffchaff into the Taita Hills, southeast Kenya

The avifauna of Kenya is often considered to be one of the best known in the Afrotropics, so new range information from well-studied areas suggests genuine change rather than just improved knowledge. We report here recent observations of Chiffchaffs *Phylloscopus collybita* in the Taita Hills (southeast Kenya, 03°20'S, 38°15'E), indicating an expansion of its known winter range. After the observation of some Chiffchaffs in Ngangao and Yale forest, Taita Hills (for a map see Brooks *et al.* 1998) in early February 2004, special attention was paid to all singing and calling *Phylloscopus* sp. in and around the forests during subsequent visits (10 January–10 March 2005 and 18 January–3 February 2006). In 2005, at least 18 Chiffchaffs were observed around Ngangao and Yale forest. In 2006, 35 individuals were recorded from Yale, Ngangao, Chawia, Fururu and Macha. Most individuals were heard between 15 January and 15 February in *Cupressus* and *Pinus* plantations, and single birds were observed in *Cupressus* trees on farmland, in *Eucalyptus* plantation and in the indigenous forest.

In addition to these field observations, one Chiffchaff was mist-netted on 17 January 2005 in vegetation dominated by *Acacia mearnsii*, and fitted with a ring from the East African ringing scheme (ring no. T43982, Figure 1). The coloration and measurements suggested *P. c. abietinus* (Svensson 1992, Clement & Helbig 1998). Measurements were: tarsus = 22.0 mm (with bent foot including “knee” joint), = 20.0 mm (with bent foot excluding “knee” joint); head = 27.4 mm; wing = 66.0 mm (“maximum length” Svensson 1992).

Chiffchaffs are known to winter in west and south Europe, parts of Africa, the Middle East and eastwards to India (Baker 1997). In western Africa, they mostly winter north of 11°N, whereas in eastern Africa, they occur further south, regularly reaching the Kenyan highlands (Lewis & Pomeroy 1989, Pearson 1997). There are few records from southern Kenya and northern Tanzania: Chyulu Hills (Lewis & Pomeroy 1989), Ngulia (Backhurst & Pearson 1990, D. Pearson pers. comm.), “Tsavo” (Ticehurst in Backhurst *et al.* 1973) and several records on Mt. Kilimanjaro (White in Backhurst *et al.* 1973, Moreau & Sclater 1935 in Backhurst *et al.* 1973, Lewis & Pomeroy 1989). The only published record from the Taita Hills was by Jackson (1999). Our observations indicate Chiffchaffs are regular winter visitors to the forest of the Taita Hills.

Some authors suggested the occurrence of Chiffchaff in Kenya was inadequately known because it is easily overlooked when not singing (eg. Backhurst *et al.* 1973, Lewis & Pomeroy 1989). However, this seems very unlikely in the Taita Hills since biological researchers (e.g. Brooks *et al.* 1998) and birdwatchers have visited the area regularly. Thus, although the species has been observed in and near to the Taita Hills before, the presence of good





**Figure 1.** Chiffchaff *Phylloscopus collybita* caught in Taita Hills, 17 January 2005 (T. Spanhove).

numbers of Chiffchaffs seems to be a recent phenomenon. Several factors could have played a role in this range-extension. Firstly, most of the Chiffchaffs were observed in *Pinus* and *Cupressus* plantations. The first exotic plantations date from 1925, and the vast majority were created after 1940 (Mbuthia 2003 and references therein). Some of the resulting plantations (eg. Ronge at 318 ha and Choke at 73.5 ha) are larger than the remaining indigenous forest fragments. These plantations could be a major attraction for Chiffchaffs. Secondly, in several European countries, the number of Chiffchaffs has significantly increased during the last 20 years (Aunins & Priednieks 2003, Vorisek 2003, Baillie *et al.* 2005). Meanwhile, they are still colonising parts of southern Scandinavia, one of the few areas of Europe not yet inhabited by Chiffchaffs (Hansson *et al.* 2000). It is likely that the increased breeding population has also resulted in an expansion of the normal winter range, especially where suitable habitat has become available.

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## **Where does Weyns's Weaver *Ploceus weynsi* breed?**

Weyns's Weaver *Ploceus weynsi* is confined to central Africa, occurring mainly around the shores of Lake Victoria and along the Congo River in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. It is primarily reported to inhabit forests (Fry & Keith 2004), but is also regularly recorded from lake-shore vegetation

(Carswell *et al.* 2005). It wanders seasonally, apparently being absent from the northern shores of Lake Victoria from June to early September (Carswell 1986), although its movement patterns are not understood. Fry & Keith (2004) report fruits as the only dietary item, although its behaviour of gleaning in the forest canopy (Fishpool 1993, pers. obs.) suggests it is insectivorous.

Very little is known of the breeding habits of this species (Fry & Keith 2004). Ash *et al.* (1991) reported the collection of a possible nest from Budongo Forest, but did not describe either the nest or its location in any way. No other nest has been found, although, due to its flocking habits, it is assumed to be a colonial breeder. In Uganda, young birds are reported to form a large proportion of flocks seen around Lake Victoria in September and are also reported in November, and young birds have been observed begging in April (Fishpool 1993). Birds are apparently known to be in breeding condition in July (Carswell 1986). In March–April, many males are in fresh plumage. Since *Ploceus* weavers generally undergo a post-breeding moult (Oschadleus & Osborne 2005, D. Oschadleus pers. com.) this suggests January–March breeding. It has further been suggested that birds move to forests to breed (Carswell 1986), although this is a somewhat puzzling statement if the species really is frugivorous, and begs the question: what are they doing in swamps?

On 2 February 2006 I visited the Mabamba Bay Important Bird Area, which encompasses an extensive marsh fringed with papyrus on the shores of Lake Victoria (Byaruhanga *et al.* 2001). Although I had never recorded Weyns's Weaver here on several previous visits, it does apparently occur here from time to time according to a local guide (K. Hannington pers. comm.). Monospecific flocks of Weyns's Weaver, numbering *c.* 50–200 birds, were flying in and out of a particular patch of papyrus bed from 10:00 to 11:00. Most seemed to be commuting between the swamp and nearby forest, with flocks repeatedly moving in both directions. When in the swamp, the flocks were focussing their attention on a tree *c.* 5 m high, with a large, spreading crown. The characteristic whizzing calls of displaying weavers were audible from the vicinity of this tree and a single nest was visible. At a distance of *c.* 100 m (the nature of the swamp prevented closer approach) the nest appeared to be a circular grass structure (typical of *Ploceus* weavers) with no extended entrance tunnel, placed on the edge of the tree *c.* 1 m above the top of the papyrus. No bird was seen displaying at the nest.

As Weyns's Weavers were the only species present at this site, and since hundreds of birds were seen flying in and out of the swamp vegetation, it is assumed that the single visible nest belonged to Weyns's Weaver. Given the number of birds attending the site, other nests must have been placed mostly within the papyrus.

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## First record of Red-footed Booby *Sula sula* and Brown Booby *Sula leucogaster* for Tanzania and other notes from Latham Island (Fungu Mubarak)

On 19–20 November 1993 we visited Latham Island (06°54'S, 39°56'E) as part of our general survey of marine life along the coast of eastern Africa (Richmond 1997). The latest summary of this site is given in Baker & Baker (2002). During our visit we took note of the birds we could identify and photographed those of interest and present here a summary of key observations.

**Masked Booby *Sula dactylatra*.** An active breeding colony occupied the entire central plateau. We estimated 7000 active nests, with perhaps the majority holding eggs. Regurgitated fish found by some of the nests included flying fish (*Parexocetus* sp.) and juvenile dolphinfish (*Coryphaena hippurus*).

**Brown Booby *Sula leucogaster*.** At least two birds were present on the eastern edge of the Masked Booby colony. They were photographed and the record has been accepted by the East African Rarities Committee as the first documented for Tanzania.

**Red-footed Booby *Sula sula*.** At least two birds were present on the

northern tip of the island. They were also photographed and the record has been accepted by the East African Rarities Committee as the first documented for Tanzania.

**Swift Tern *Sterna bergii*.** There was an active colony on the western edge of the plateau that we estimated at c. 600–1000 birds.

**Sooty Tern *Sterna fuscata*.** Known to breed on Latham in large colonies (Baker & Baker 2002) there were very few present during our visit. Only c. 50–100 birds were seen at the southern tip of the island.

**Brown Noddy *Anous stolidus*.** There was a small colony of c. 1000 birds on the north-western edge of the plateau and a larger one of c. 3000 birds on the southern tip of the island.

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## Yellow-billed Stork breeding in eastern Uganda

There have been no definite breeding records of Yellow-billed Stork *Mycteria ibis* in Uganda despite immature birds being sighted at Kajjansi in 1982 (Carswell 1986) and reports in Mackworth-Praed & Grant (1957). Between 30 April and 26 June 2004, I found Yellow-billed Stork breeding at three waterbird colonies in eastern Uganda. One colony was located by the railway quarters in Mbale town (01°N, 34°E), one in the hospital grounds at Busolwe (00°N, 33°E) and one near the trading centre at Nampologoma (00°N, 34°E). The number of breeding pairs of Yellow-billed Stork varied at each colony. A maximum of 129 pairs were recorded at Busolwe, 26 pairs at the Mbale colony and 4 pairs at Nampologoma. Five other bird species, African Spoonbill *Platalea alba*, Black-headed Heron *Ardea melanocephala*, Cattle Egret *Bubulcus ibis*, Pink-backed Pelican *Pelecanus rufescens* and Sacred Ibis *Threskiornis aethiopicus* were also found breeding at these colonies (Table 1). Nests were

located in medium-sized, live trees of *Ficus* sp., *Cassia leptophylla*, Mango *Mangifera* sp. and ‘Mvule’ *Milicia excelsea*.

Colony location and the size of the breeding population were probably related to both nest site characteristics (the number of trees at the colony) and proximity to suitable foraging areas (including rice fields). The Nampologoma colony is located less than 5 km from the Doho rice scheme, the Busolwe colony is located within 5 km of the Nakwiga swamp that has had extensive drainage for rice growing, and the Mbale colony is located within 10 km of the Mbale sewage works and the Napwoli and Nambale wetlands that have been converted to small-scale rice and vegetable farming.

**Table 1.** Species and numbers of breeding pairs of large waterbirds at three colonies holding Yellow-billed Storks in Uganda.

Species	Mbale	Busolwe	Nampologoma
African Spoonbill	8	94	38
Black-headed Heron	64	109	4
Cattle Egret	91	210	30
Pink-backed Pelican	30	70	0
Sacred Ibis	0	67	14

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First record of White-crowned Plover *Vanellus albiceps* in Uganda

On the afternoon of 10 July 2003 I was on the top deck of the Uganda National Parks launch sailing towards the famous falls in the Murchison Falls National Park. The river Nile was very high which meant that there were none of the usual sandbanks available for birds such as plovers and skimmers. We were



about 2–3 km from the falls when I noticed a distinctive, mainly white, bird flying downstream towards us. I quickly picked it out with my binoculars and immediately identified it as a White-crowned Plover. I called out to my safari clients, Tod and Noreen Likinks, to look at the bird. The distinctive white forehead, the extensive long, pointed, yellow wattles and the almost completely white underwing pattern were well seen as the bird flew by at about 15–20 m from the launch. As it flew away, its trailing bright yellow legs were seen well.

White-crowned Plovers are normally birds of open sandbanks which I have seen commonly along the Zambesi River in Zambia and Zimbabwe as well in Ruaha National Park and Selous National Reserve in Tanzania. Such sand banks are present for most of the year along the Nile in Murchison Falls National Park. The unusually high water was probably attributable to late and heavy rains in East Africa that year. It is possible that this weather pattern also affected water levels in West Africa where this species also occurs and pushed this bird from that population into Uganda.

There are two unsubstantiated records of White-crowned Plover from Uganda (Anon 1971, Mann 1976) but this is the first properly documented record and has been accepted by the East African Rarities Committee.

#### References

- Anon. 1971. *Uganda National Parks Handbook*. Uganda: Longman.  
Mann, C.F. 1976. Some recent changes in our knowledge of bird distribution in East Africa. *Journal of the East African Natural History Society and National Museum*, 157:1–24.

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## East African Bird Rarities Committee report

The latest circulation of the East African Rarities Committee has resulted in the acceptance of six records for the region, including one addition to the East African list. These are detailed below. The committee will currently consider the first five records of any species for Kenya, Uganda and Tanzania. Records from other countries within the *Scopus* region (Sudan, Ethiopia, Djibouti, Somalia, Rwanda, Burundi, Zambia, Malawi and the Indian Ocean islands) can also be submitted to the editor of *Scopus*. The current committee members are: Neil Baker, David Fisher, Colin Jackson, Jeremy Lindsell, Willis Okech, David Pearson and Don Turner. Please send submission to [jeremy.lindsell@rspb.org.uk](mailto:jeremy.lindsell@rspb.org.uk)

### **Broad-billed Sandpiper** *Limicola falcinellus*

Second inland Tanzanian record, on a seasonal pool around Sinya area, Tanzania, 24 April 2004, Itai Shanni.

### **Karamoja Apalis** *Apalis karamojae*

Second record for Kenya, north of the Masai Mara, 23 August 2004, Phil Shaw.

### **Karamoja Apalis** *Apalis karamojae*

Third record for Kenya, Narok/Keekorok Road, Kenya, 22 January 2005, Nigel Hunter and Leo Niskanen.

### **Toro Olive Greenbul** *Phyllastrephus hypochloris*

First record for Tanzania, Minziro Forest Reserve in northwest Tanzania, 26 July 2000, Lindy McBride.

### **Sooty Shearwater** *Puffinus griseus*

First record for East Africa, corpse washed up on beach at Watamu, Kenya, 30 May 2004, Simon Valle and Colin Jackson.

### **Lesser Frigatebird** *Fregata ariel*

Third or fourth record for Kenya, Sabaki River Mouth, Kenya, 31 December 2004, Simon Valle.

## Book review

**Raptors of the world: a field guide.** Ferguson-Lees, J. & Christie, D. 2005. 320pp. incl. 118 colour plates. London: Christopher Helm Publishers Ltd. £19.99.

This volume is basically the introduction and plates from the original larger

volume *Raptors of the World* (Ferguson-Lees & Christie 2001 Helm), modified by comments from reviewers. The introduction discusses raptor topography, identification, migration, moult and aging criteria, taxonomic sequence and nomenclature of raptors and the vexed question of English names (it's my opinion that enough discussion has already appeared on this subject and as long as a scientific name is given, English names are unimportant). This volume includes nineteen species not covered in the original guide: one new South American species plus several races elevated to species level.

The first few plates give illustrations of each genus divided into old and new worlds: a useful way to help one reach the right plate. Some of this volume's plates are excellent—for instance some of the falcons and accipiters. However, others—for instance fish eagles and vultures, especially the lammergeyer—seem a bit unlikelike. The plates in the *Handbook of the birds of the world*, volume two (Elliott *et al.* 1994 Lynx Edicions) are more consistent in quality. The maps in this improved version are the best available, even if a bit small. I noticed improvements in them from the earlier volume, particularly on the Red-necked Falcon map. The text, usefully, compares the size of the female relative to that of the male (even if it is difficult to judge in the field). This volume pays more attention to ageing and sexing which is welcome. A problem with the original volume was that not all the listed references appear in the bibliography and this problem is not wholly ironed out.

Finally, I wonder whether its worth taking into the field a volume of all the world's raptors; probably a good African guide would be preferable such as the *SASOL Guide to the birds of prey of Africa and its islands* (Kemp & Kemp 1999 New Holland) which gives a full double page to each species with excellent illustrations of birds perched and flying and detailed plumage descriptions. The current volume can then be consulted when back at home.

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## Editorial

*Scopus* is thirty years old in 2007. The journal started out as a forum to gather ornithological observations from the region. The earlier papers concentrated on distribution and status, breeding records, natural history observations and identification. In later years, the journal has taken on a much more conservation focus with emphasis given to threatened species and habitats within the region. This shift as much reflects a change within the journal's constituency as with any editorial policy.

Despite the relatively low volume of material in *Scopus* and the humble production standards, the impact of the journal over the years has been significant. Readers of any of the volumes of *Birds of Africa* will be aware of how substantially *Scopus* contributed to their text. This pattern is being repeated in the ongoing *Handbook of the Birds of the World* series. Species action plans and the prioritisation of conservation areas are also benefiting from the body of knowledge that *Scopus* has published.

There are a number of changes to the *Scopus* editorial board to report. Graeme Backhurst and Don Turner stand down from the board with this issue. Graeme was the founding editor of *Scopus* and continued to edit the journal for many years. Since then, he has served on the editorial board, but now feels the time has come for him to step down. He has undertaken an enormous amount of work in establishing *Scopus* and maintaining it over the years and we are very grateful to him. Don has also been a long-standing board member and frequent contributor. He is an authority on the birds of East Africa and, like Graeme, will be sorely missed on the board. We welcome to the board Muchai Muchane of the Department of Ornithology at the National Museum of Kenya. It has been some years since the Department was represented on the board and it is good to see that situation change. We also welcome Darcy Ogada, who is providing much-needed editorial and production support.

And finally, with this volume, I am handing over the editorial lead to Dr Mwangi Githiru. This is an important step for the journal because Mwangi is part of a new generation of East African ornithologists that is making an impact beyond the region. Mwangi has an excellent scientific record and I hope you will share my enthusiasm as he takes over.

Jeremy Lindsell

Tanzania. Pp. 203–228 in Lovett, J.C. & Wasser, S.K. (eds) *Biogeography and ecology of the rainforests of Eastern Africa*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.  
Urban, E.K., Fry, C.H. & Keith, S. (eds) 1986. *The birds of Africa*. Vol. II. London: Academic Press.

Contributions should be submitted electronically or on paper. Electronic submissions should be emailed to the editor as a Microsoft Word document or a Rich Text Format (RTF) file. All figures (e.g. maps, graphs, photographs) should be supplied as separate, high resolution, graphics files (e.g. TIFF, EPS, JPEG, WMF) and not inserted into the text file. It will not be possible to reproduce figures inserted into the text file. The desired position of figures in the text should be indicated by the figure caption. For paper submissions, manuscripts should be typed in double-spacing on one side of the paper only, with wide margins all round. Original black-and-white photographs and line illustrations should not be larger than A4 (210 × 297 mm). Line illustrations should be on good quality white paper or board, or on tracing material, with lettering of professional quality (if this is not possible, label an overlay, not the original figure). Authors of papers receive five copies, and authors of short communications one copy, of their contribution *gratis*. Extra copies, charged at cost, must be ordered when the MS is accepted. All authors receive a PDF of the pages on which their article appears.

Please send all contributions to:  
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The Editor, *Scopus* c/o RSPB, The Lodge,  
Sandy, Bedfordshire, SG19 2DL UK.  
Email: jeremy.lindsay@rspb.org.uk

### **Rare birds in East Africa**

Records of rare birds from Kenya, Tanzania and Uganda are assessed by the East Africa Rarities Committee. Records from other countries in the region can also be submitted for review and possible publication in *Scopus*. A full account of the record should be sent to the *Scopus* editor at the address above or to East Africa Rarities Committee, c/o Nature Kenya, P.O. Box 44486, G.P.O. 00100, Nairobi, Kenya.  
Tel. +254 20 3749957.

Email: jeremy.lindsay@rspb.org.uk

### **Ringling scheme of eastern Africa**

This covers several countries in the area. Qualified and aspiring ringers should contact the ringing organizer, Graeme Backhurst, P.O. Box 15194, Langata 00509, Nairobi, Kenya.

Tel. +254 20 3891419.

Email: graeme@wananchi.com

### **EANHS Nest Record Scheme**

Details of most kinds of breeding activity are welcomed by the scheme and nest record cards may be obtained free of charge from the Nest Record Scheme organizer, c/o Nature Kenya, P.O. Box 44486, G.P.O. 00100, Nairobi, Kenya.

Tel. +254 20 3749957.

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### **The BirdLife International Partnership in eastern Africa**

The BirdLife Partnership in eastern Africa co-ordinates bird conservation work and produces several other publications of interest to ornithologists.

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